Remarks in a Discussion at the Ministers' Leadership Conference in South Barrington, Illinois

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Rev. Bill Hybels. It wasn't as bad as I told you it was going to be. [*Laughter*]

The President. It's never been as bad as you told me it was going to be. [*Laughter*]

Reverend Hybels. You know, there are some cynics out there that think that I'm just going to ask you a bunch of softball questions. They don't know me very well.

The President. They obviously never sat in on any of our sessions. [*Laughter*]

Buddy

Reverend Hybels. So I'm going to start with a tough one: How's Buddy? [*Laughter*]

The President. He's doing fine. I'm not doing as well as he is. We took him up to Martha's Vineyard for a little family weekend, and we went swimming in the ocean. And he panicked and jumped on me, and I forgot to give him a manicure first. [*Laughter*] So it's a good thing I've got a suit on. [*Laughter*]

Ministers' Leadership Conference

Reverend Hybels. All right. These folks all know you and I have been meeting for many years. I'd just like to ask you, how would you characterize for these people what our meetings are like?

The President. Well, first of all, they all have certain things in common, then they're different from time to time. They all include you asking me point blank about the state of my spiritual life, and if you think I give you an evasive answer, then you do pointed followup questions. [*Laughter*] And then—and they all end with a prayer. Most of the time we both pray.

Before we came out here, we both prayed. I prayed that you wouldn't give me too tough a time for asking me to come here today. And then we talk about things. We talk about what's going on, what's going on at the office. You ask about the other people that work for me and how they're doing. If there is some particular issue in the news, we talked about that, or particularly if there's a big development involving war or peace, we talk about that.

And you've given me the opportunity to ask you questions about what you do. I mean, I was fascinated about how Willow Creek was born and grew and how you got into this business that I think is so important, of trying to build up the strength of local churches throughout the country and throughout the world. And I've learned about how I do my work by talking to you about how you do yours. And I hope that the reverse is true on occasion.

But basically, they've been spiritual conversations, conversations between two friends. There are some things that are always the same, and then they change based on what's going on.

Reverend Hybels. Now, recently, you told me that you think more pastors should try to help politicians; they should make themselves available and offer to kind of play the role that I've played.

The President. Yes, I really believe that.

Reverend Hybels. Why?

The President. First of all, because we need it, and not just someone like me, who obviously does. But we do. In 1918 the German sociologist Max Weber wrote an essay. You and I never talked about this before; I just thought about it while you asked me the question. It's called "Politics as a Vocation." And Weber was a Christian Democrat, a devout Catholic. And he said politics is a long and slow boring of hard boards. And anyone who seeks to do it must risk his own soul.

Now, what did he mean by that? What he meant by that was, even in a democracy, where you draw your authority from the people, you have it for a limited amount of time, and it's self-circumscribed by the Constitution. You get the ability to make decisions which affect other people's lives, decisions which are beyond your own wisdom, often made under circumstances which are unimaginably difficult, either because you're under political or personal duress.

And I just think it's—most people who don't know any people in public life who have to make those kind of decisions may think, well, they're just—they don't have a spiritual life, or they're all automatons, or they're not this, that, or the other thing. I can tell you,

most of the people I've known in 30 years of public life, Democrats and Republicans, have been good, honest, honorable people who tried to do what they thought was right, and when they differed, it was because they honestly differed. Ninety percent of the time-plus that's been true. But if you're not careful, when you have this kind of job, it can overtake you. You can believe it's even more important than it is. You can let it take up even more time than it should. And it can crowd out all that other stuff inside you that keeps you centered and growing and whole.

And it's very important that everybody in public life has somebody who's talking to them who either has no interest in either playing up to them and telling them what they want to hear, no interest in getting something from them, and no interest in attacking them—that has anything to do with the fact that the person is in public life. And a pastor can do that in a way that, and you just sort of—you can't imagine how much time that I've spent with you and, over the last couple of years, the time that I've spent also with Gordon McDonald and Tony Campolo and Phil Wogaman—how much it means to me, because it sort of takes me out of all the stuff that's going on and forces me to look at it in a different way and to look at my own life in a different way. And it really kind of keeps me anchored. And you can—all of you can do that for somebody else.

1958 Billy Graham Crusade

Reverend Hybels. Something spiritual came into focus for you when you were just a young boy, about 10 years old. Tell us about that.

The President. Well, really, it had a lot to do with how I wound up in public life, I think. I became a Christian in 1955, when I was 9, went to Park Place Baptist Church in Hot Springs, Arkansas. The minister's name was James Fitzgerald. He's a great, good man.

Reverend Hybels. Now, did you like hear a sermon and then—[*inaudible*].

The President. No, I had been a regular churchgoer ever since I was about 6. But yes, I loved this man. I haven't seen him since. I haven't seen him in 45 years. But I have a very vivid memory of exactly what he looked like and the way he talked, and he touched my heart. He convinced me that I needed to acknowledge that I was a sinner and that I needed to accept Christ in my heart, and I did. But I was 9 years old, and I was trying to figure out what it all meant.

So then, when I was about 11 years old, maybe 12, the whole State was in an uproar. I guess I was 12; I think it was September of 1958. Billy Graham was coming to Little Rock to do a crusade in War Memorial Stadium, which is where the Arkansas Razorbacks play their football games when they're playing in Little Rock. And Billy Graham's the only person that could get a bigger crowd than the football team. [*Laughter*]

So the schools in Little Rock had just been closed in the Little Rock integration crisis. Some of you who are older will remember it. Perhaps if you're younger, you read about it. But 1957 was the first big crisis of the school integration movement, and the Governor closed the schools, called out the National Guard to keep nine black children out of the schools and then closed them for a year, and all the kids had to go somewhere else to school.

And the White Citizens Council was basically dominating the politics of the town. So Billy Graham scheduled these crusades years in advance, and he didn't plan all this. All of a sudden, he's supposed to step in the middle of this. And my Sunday school teacher was going to take me and a bunch of kids over to hear him. I never will forget it. And the White Citizens Council and a lot of the business people in Little Rock were worried about some sort of great encounter because the racial tensions were very high, and they asked Billy Graham to agree to give this crusade to a segregated audience.

And he said that if they insisted on that, he would not come, that we were all children of God, and he wanted to lead everyone to Christ. He wouldn't do it. And it really touched me, because my grandparents, who had no education, particularly, and were very modest people, were among the few white people I knew who supported school integration. And all of a sudden, to have Billy Graham validating this based on his Christian witness had a profound impact on me. And

it got me to thinking at that early age about the relationship between your faith and your work, which, of course, has been one of the most hotly debated issues in Christianity for 2,000 years now. What does the Book of James really mean, and all that?

But I really—I can't tell you what it meant. And for a long time right after that I would send a little bit of my allowance money to Billy Graham. You know, I'm still on somebody's list somewhere—[*laughter*]—for giving next to no money, but it was a pretty good chunk of what I had.

And he came back to Arkansas 30 years later to do another crusade. And I took him by to see my pastor, who was dying at the time and who had been his friend for decades, and we relived that moment, and I've never forgotten it. And I never will. It's just like it happened yesterday to me. Even now, I can hardly talk about it.

President's Church Attendance

Reverend Hybels. Now, you and Hillary have been churchgoers all the time in your public service. And some people think that's just an act. How would you respond?

The President. Well, at least, it's a consistent act. [*Laughter*] Well, I think I have given evidence that I need to be in church. [*Laughter*] To me, it's—you know, I don't talk about it a lot. I never sought to politicize it. But it was very interesting. I started off, and I went to church with great regularity until I graduated from college—high school. And like a lot of people, when I went to college, my attendance became more sporadic.

And actually, Hillary had been very active in her local Methodist church in Park Ridge, which is not too far from here, when she was growing up. And I remember when I was elected Governor, I had my dedicatory service in the church—this was 1979—in the church in Little Rock, which I'm still a member, Emmanuel Baptist Church. And Hillary said to me, "You know, we should start going to church again on a regular basis. We ought to do it, and you should join the choir. It would do you good to think about something besides politics."

So I talked to the choir director, and because I was Governor, I was out 3 or 4 nights a week, I couldn't go to practice. But I had been in music all my life, so I was a good sight reader, so he let me sing anyway.

So from 1980 until the year I became President, I got to sing in my church choir every Sunday, and it meant a lot to me. And then after we came here, we both, because we wanted to go together and with our daughter, we both started going to the Methodist church outside here in Washington, Foundry Methodist Church, that Dr. Wogaman is the pastor of, and you know him, of course. And we've gone pretty regularly for 7½ years now.

So I've been doing this a long time. I don't do it for anybody else; I do it for me. It helps me to go. It helps me—the same way it helps me to spend an hour talking to you. I'm sitting there in church, just like everybody else, except needing it maybe more, and it's one of the best hours of the week for me. I just let everything else go, take my Bible, read, listen, sing. I don't know, why does anybody go? It means something to me. It's a way of not only validating my faith but deepening it and basically replenishing it.

One of the things I like about my observant Jewish friends—and you've seen a lot about this in the last few days with all the publicity over Senator Lieberman becoming the Vice Presidential nominee—is that they take a whole day, and I mean they really take the day. They don't go to service for an hour. I mean for a day they shut down and shut the whole world out and think about what's most important in life. Anyway, in a very small way, that's what my church attendance does for me.

President's Spiritual Life

Reverend Hybels. Okay. So if we were having our regular meeting, this would be the time when I would ask the consistent question: What's the current condition of your spiritual life? Describe right now where you're at spiritually.

The President. Well, I feel much more at peace than I used to. And I think that as awful as what I went through was, humiliating as it was, more to others than to me, even, sometimes when you think you've got something behind you and then

it's not behind you, this sort of purging process, if it doesn't destroy you, can bring you to a different place.

I'm now in the second year of a process of trying to totally rebuild my life from a terrible mistake I made. And I now see—I don't think anybody can say, "Hey, the state of my spiritual life is great. It's constant, and it's never going to change." I think I've learned enough now to know that's not true, that it's always a work in progress, and you just have to hope you're getting better every day. But if you're not getting better, chances are you're getting worse. That this has to be a dynamic, ongoing effort.

But you know, I had to come to terms with a lot of things about the fundamental importance of character and integrity. Integrity, to me, means—is a literal term. It means the integration of one's spirit, mind, and body being in the same place at the same time with everything, doing what you believe is right and you believe is consistent with the will of God.

It's been an amazing encounter, you know, trying to rebuild my family life, which is the most important thing of all—and it took a lot of effort that I've never talked about and probably never will, because I don't really think it's anybody else's concern—and then to rebuild the support of the people I work with to try to be worthy of the fact that two-thirds of the American people stuck with me. That's an incredible thing.

So I wake up every day, no matter what anybody says or what goes wrong or whatever, with this overwhelming sense of gratitude. Because it may be that if I hadn't been knocked down in the way I was and forced to come to grips with what I'd done and the consequences of it, in such an awful way, I might not ever have had to really deal with it a hundred percent.

This kind of thing happens to—not, maybe, this kind of thing—but all kinds of problems come up in people's lives all the time, and usually they're not played out with several billion dollars of publicity on the neon lights before people. But they still have to be dealt with. And in a funny way, when you realize there is nothing left to hide, then it sort of frees you up to do what you ought to be doing anyway. I don't know if that makes any sense, but to me, I feel this overwhelming sense of gratitude.

I also learned a lot about forgiveness. I've always thought I was sort of a forgiving, generous person, you know, nonjudgmental in a negative sense, not that I don't have opinions. But I realized once you've actually had to stand up and ask for forgiveness before the whole wide world, it makes it a little harder to be as hard as I think I once was on other people, and that's meant something to me, too. I think I've learned something about that.

Reverend Hybels. A lot of people, when they learned that I was going to interview you and a lot of people who know that we've been meeting, have said to me, "The guy never really apologized. The guy never really owned it and came clean about his mistakes, tried to hide it, said it didn't happen. He never came clean." Now, that's a little surprising to me, because we sent a staff member, one of our senior staff members, to the White House the day in September of '98 when you gave one of the most clear confessional statements that I have ever heard.

I'm not going to ask for a hand raise or anything, but there's a whole bunch of people here who think you never really said it.

The President. No, I don't know why. I just—you know, to me—I had to come—there was a lot of things going on at the time, as you remember, that were unrelated, I think, to the fact that I did something wrong that I needed to acknowledge, apologize for, and then begin a process of atonement for. And there were a few days when I basically was thinking more about what my adversaries were trying to do than what I should be trying to do.

And finally, this breakfast we had—we're about to have it, actually. We're coming up on the second anniversary of the prayer breakfast I have every year for people of all different faiths in the White House that we sort of do at the start of school, because it's kind of a rededication period. And I've done it for 8 years, over and above the President's prayer breakfast, which is a—there's a whole committee that does that. Hillary and I just invite people to the White House, and we have breakfast, and we talk about whatever

we're talking about that year. We pray together, and people get up and say whatever they want to say.

But I think I gave a clear, unambiguous, brutally frank, and frankly personally painful statement to me because I had to do it. I mean, I finally realized that I was—it would never be all right unless I stood up there and said what I did and said it was wrong and apologized for it.

But I think what happened was, I think anybody who was there thought so; I think anybody who read it thought so. I don't know what was covered by television, really, because I don't watch the TV news much, or what was written in the newspaper or who heard it. But I think that anyone who saw that and who observed what happened afterward would not doubt that there had been a full and adequate apology.

Reverend Hybels. You sent me the text of it right then, and I read it, and it was—I mean, I'm an elder at this church, as well as the pastor, and we've had many times where people have had to make confessions, and this was as clean. You said, "Not only am I"—you said, "There's no fancy way—there's not a fancy way to say it, I have sinned." And you went on and quoted from Psalm 51 and talked about the need for a broken and contrite heart, and you confessed that.

And you went on to say that it's not enough just to say I'm sorry, there has to be the fruits of repentance and the gathering together of people who would hold you accountable for walking a new way. You announced that day publicly you were putting an accountability group together that would meet with you and help you stay on a new path. And you ended the speech by saying, "Let the words in my mouth, the meditation in my heart, and the work of my hands be pleasing to my God."

It was about as clean as I have ever read something like that. And it must have been terribly frustrating for you to live on in the future with the sense that there's a whole bunch of people who just continue to believe you never came clean.

The President. Oh, it was for a little bit. But I think one of the things you learn is that even a President—all you can do is be responsible for what you do, and what other people say about it or whether it gets out there—you have to work hard to get it out there, but—I suppose there was a time when I was upset about it. But then I realized that that was another form of defensiveness, that if I really thought about that, that was just another excuse not to be doing what I should be doing, which is to work on my life, work on my marriage, work on my parenthood, work on my work with the White House and the administration, and work on serving the American people.

So believe it or not, I haven't thought about it in a long, long time now. I thought about it a little bit now because you asked me to do this, and I said, yes, and here we are in the soup together. But I don't think about it now, because I realize that anytime you're supposed to be doing something with your life and you get off thinking about what somebody else is saying or doing about it or to you or whatever, it's just a crutch for not dealing with what you're supposed to be dealing with. So I finally just let it go, and I hope people can see that it's different. You just have to hope that and go on.

Leadership

Reverend Hybels. Let's switch subject matters and go over to leadership. I mean, you know a lot about leadership. And you've been the leader of the most powerful country in the world for almost 8 years now. So okay, leadership questions, are we all right on that, or is there anything more you wanted to say on other stuff?

The President. I thought you'd never change the subject. [*Laughter*]

Reverend Hybels. All right, then. When did you first recognize that you were a leader? It's not a trick question. I'm just asking it. [*Laughter*]

The President. I know. I'm just trying to remember. When I was young—I don't know, in grade school—I used to often be the person who sort of organized the games and got people to do things and all that kind of stuff. But I don't know that I ever thought about it in leadership terms. And I began to get interested in all this when I got interested in politics as a kid.

We got a television when I was 9, I think, or 10. We didn't have a television until I was

about 10. I watched the 1956 Republican and Democratic conventions. I was just fascinated by it. And then by 1960, I began to think, "Well, maybe I could actually do this some day, because I'm real interested in people; I care a lot about these issues."

But I think the first things I actually did were when I was in high school and I was the president of my class and the head of the band and I used to organize the State Band Festival with the band director. And one time I remember a young man came to school, he came to our school. He hadn't been there very long, and he was in the band. And he had a fight with a teacher, and he said a very intemperate thing. At least, back then, you couldn't do that kind of thing, and she suspended him.

So he was going to miss this big band trip we were taking over the weekend. And this kid had come to our town; he had no friends; he was all alone. Anyway, I decided that he ought to go. And the teacher, by blind coincidence, was a woman I very much admired. Her husband had been a plumber, and she was a housewife and a genius. And they both went back to school in their mid-thirties. And they lived across the street from me, just by coincidence.

So I went to her house, and I told her why she ought to reinstate this kid. And I said, I want to bring him to you and let him apologize. But, I said, "I don't know what's going on in his life, but he's a decent kid. And he's absolutely in the wrong, and you're absolutely right to suspend him. But you ought not to do it anyway, because he just got here, and this will be good for him if he takes this trip; he'll make friends and everything."

So she agreed to let me bring this kid to see her. And he apologized and cried, and she cried, and they became—it was great. He went on the trip. I never saw him again after I graduated from high school until I ran for President in 1992. But that made me want to be a leader. I don't know if that meant I could be. I was about—I don't know—I was 15 or 16 years old. But it made me understand that you could do things that would make a difference in other people's lives if you just thought about it in the right way.

Reverend Hybels. All right. So you started realizing you had leadership skills or talents in you. But then at some point you said, "I'm going to direct this leadership toward the political arena." I mean, you could have been a leader in business; you could have been a leader in academia; you could have been a leader in ministry, probably. [*Laughter*]

The President. You will find this funny, in light of all that's happened. When I was about 11, I gave my grandmother a big speech about civil rights. I was just going on and on, waving my arms and everything. My grandmother looked at me, and she said, "You know, Billy, I think you could be a preacher if you were just a little better boy." [*Laughter*] True story.

Reverend Hybels. But anyway, you decided to choose—I'm not going to follow up on that one. I'm letting that one go.

The President. Thank you.

Reverend Hybels. I mean, that was a free shot for me, and I took a pass. [*Laughter*] So please acknowledge.

The President. I owe you one.

Well, like I said, I was about 16, I guess, that I really decided that if I could do this kind of work, I would like to do it, this political work.

And the only other thing I had—I had thought about being a doctor, and I was very interested in it. But I knew I wouldn't be great at it. I thought about being a musician, and I was really quite good when I was in high school. And I knew I would be very good. But I didn't think I could be the best. Especially then, you know, 40 years ago, if you were a saxophone player, there weren't any saxophone players like there are up here on this church stage. And there was certainly nobody like Kenny G making a living just making records.

I mean, if you wanted to make a living doing that, you had to get your days and nights mixed up. You had to go to some club, stay up all night playing jazz; you'd sleep all day. How was I going to have a family? How was I going to have a life? And it certainly wouldn't be worth it unless you literally were the greatest person doing it.

And I knew I was real good but not great. I thought to myself, I can do this really well,

what I'm doing now, and I love it. And it's like the only thing I could ever think of where every day you're getting up and peeling another slice off the onion of human existence. There's like an endless layer of exposure to different people and different problems and different dreams.

So I decided when I was about 16 that if I could do it, I would. And I would do it because I could do it better than I could do anything else. And I must say it was a great advantage to me in life. It's like there are all these great stories coming out now on Tiger Woods and how he's done things younger than anybody else has ever done and how he used to keep Jack Niklaus' golf records taped on his bedstead, you know. He decided younger than I did what he was going to do. It's a huge advantage.

You pay a little price for it, too. None of these decisions are free in life, but I think it is a big advantage. And I've always been grateful that I just knew when I was young.

Reverend Hybels. There's always that picture of you shaking hands with John Kennedy. Was that as momentous in your mind at the time as people have made it out to be since?

The President. Yes, but not in the way they make it out to be. I mean, that is I think if I had never gone in and shaken his hand, I still would have tried to go into politics because it's what I wanted to do. But I admired him, and I supported him when I was 14. He was running for President—we used to have these great debates in my ninth-grade class. And my very best friend as a child, who is still one of my closest friends—we stay in touch all the time and he sends me an E-mail once a week. He's in the computer business in Arkansas and comes to see me and tells me when he thinks I'm all wet. But he was there. He came from a Republican family, and I came from a Republican county. So he was for President Nixon, and I was for President Kennedy. And we'd have our little debates in the ninth grade.

And for me, it was basically about civil rights, which I felt very strongly about. So when I got to go to Boys Nation, the American Legion did a great thing for me. It was a huge deal for me—I was a 16-year-old kid from Arkansas—to get on an airplane, go to Washington, go to the White House, stand in the Rose Garden. And we all were standing there in alphabetical order by State, so Arkansas was near the front. And President Kennedy gave this little speech and complimented us on what we'd done in civil rights legislation, because it was a mock Senate program, this Boys Nation program. He said we were doing better than the real Senate, which is probably still true. [*Laughter*]

And anyway—Trent Lott will make me pay for that. [*Laughter*] Anyway, so then he comes down, and he starts shaking hands. I was the biggest kid from any of the States that started with A, so I just sort of muscled my way up there and got to shake hands. But he was kind enough to stand there for many minutes and shake hands with all the kids.

And I think in every year but one—this year, because I had an emergency, or a very important thing I had to do, and we had to slot the Boys Nation and Girls Nation people in—every year except this one, I've actually stood there and shaken hands with and had a picture taken with every one of those kids, because you just never know when something you do to some child from a small hamlet in North Dakota or an inner-city neighborhood in L.A., or anywhere else—just by taking a little bit of time, that the child might imagine that he or she could do something that otherwise they hadn't imagined.

So what Kennedy, meeting him, I think, did for me is it gave me—first of all, I was just touched that the President was seeing us and paying a little attention to us, but it gave me the ability to imagine that I might have this life that I knew I wanted.

Reverend Hybels. All right. Characterize your leadership style. Would you say like you're a visionary leader, a strategic leader, team-building leader?

The President. Well, you probably ought to ask the people who came with me today. They would probably say, an exhausting one. [*Laughter*] Let me try—first of all, I think the vision is the most important thing. I mean, to me, what you have to have, if you want to really lead in any endeavor you've got to say, "Okay, what is my objective? What are the facts here? What are the facts on the ground? Here's my vision." Then you need

a strategy for how you're going to achieve your vision. Then you have to have all these tactics that explain it. Then you have to put together a team that can do what you can't do.

And so what I have tried to do is to focus on the vision thing, as some politicians say. I mean, it's not for nothing that the Scripture says, "where there is no vision, the people perish." I mean it is the most important thing. Otherwise you get—remember that great old Yogi Berra line, "I may not know where I'm going, but I'm making good time." I mean, that happens to everybody in life, and part of it is when you lose your vision.

But I also—I think that team-building is very important because a lot of the things that I get credit for, the good things that have happened have been done by somebody else that I empowered to act, consistent with an agreed upon plan that we started with. I mean, one of the things that frustrates me—it's no different from everybody else that's had this position, but Vice President Gore doesn't get near enough credit for a lot of the things that I've done that he was the main executor on.

I've been very fortunate. I've had one Secretary of Education, Dick Riley, the former Governor of South Carolina, and there's been a dramatic amount of improvement in the schools that we've been an integral part of because of him. I've had one Secretary of Health and Human Services; one Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, who has probably made the greatest impact on the interior in a positive way since the days of Harold Ickes in Roosevelt's administration or Gifford Pinchot before that in Teddy Roosevelt's administration.

So the team is very important. If you don't have the people around you that are good, you can have the vision, and you can have the strategy, but if you're doing anything that requires more than one person to do it, if you're doing something besides writing a book, you've got to have somebody else to help you.

Reverend Hybels. When I first started seeing you, you had quite a few Arkansas folks in the early days or friends that you brought with you in the early days into the office. And then my perception—and I don't think we've ever talked about this, actually—my perception is some of them found out that the job was over their heads, and eventually you had to ask some people who started with you to do something else.

The President. The truth is, though, most of the people that came with me from home have done very well. The most popular member of the Cabinet, I think, is James Lee Witt, the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. And he was the county judge in this little rural county in Arkansas where my step-father was born. He was my head of the Emergency Management Agency, and the reason he's popular is we've had a lot of disasters since I've been President—natural disasters, I mean. [*Laughter*] We've had a lot of natural disasters, and he's the first guy that ever had that job that got it not as a political appointment. He really knows it.

The person who does all my appointments, Bob Nash, is from Arkansas. It's one of the most difficult and sensitive jobs in the Government. Nancy Hernreich, whom you know and work with, she's obviously from Arkansas. So I've had a huge number of people I brought up with.

The only two that I can think of just off the top of my head—some of the others have come and gone, but they came and went for the same reasons others come and go. The only two I can think of that really changed their jobs or that left their jobs under less than optimum circumstances, one of them, principally, was Vince Foster who, as you know, in a heartbreaking incident actually killed himself, apparently partly because of criticism he was receiving in the press that he thought was unfair and unjust and untrue.

And I must tell you, that had a big impact on me and my wife. I had gone to kindergarten with him. Everybody thought at home that he was maybe not only the best but the most ethical lawyer they ever knew. And he had this self-image of himself that was completely assaulted from day one in Washington, and he took it seriously. I'll never forget talking to him a day or so before he died. And I said, "You know, how can you take this seriously? These people, they don't know anything about you." And I said, "Everybody

that reads this editorial page is against us anyway. None of these people are going to vote for us." And for me, I was so used to being beat on, I was insensitive to the fact that a man that I had lived next door to when I was 4 years old was dying inside, literally.

And it's something that I think pastors—maybe this has happened to you before, and if it hasn't, I hope it never will, but it's something you've got to be sensitive to. I thought he was receiving all this incoming fire in the way that I was receiving it. And instead, he was receiving it the way Woodrow Wilson talked about when he was President. He said that words could wound more than bullets and that it took an extraordinary courage to bear up under it.

I'd been in public life and debates so long, I was so used to people saying things for whatever reason; I missed it. So I tried to joke him out of this, instead of being sensitive to it. He performed very well, but he didn't understand the Washington culture.

When Mack McLarty, who went to kindergarten with me and was a big time automotive executive, became my Chief of Staff, he didn't want to do it. He said, "You need somebody with Washington experience." But we had put most of those people that we had into the Cabinet. And so, I knew he was a good manager. It's interesting. So after a couple of years he moved on and became my Special Envoy to the Americas, where he helped to, basically, dramatically improve and broaden our relationship with all the countries south of our border and where he still does work for me, even though he's returned. He and Henry Kissinger have gone into business together. So McLarty has done very, very well. But he didn't want to be Chief of Staff. It's just that, at the time they were fixing to swear me in, and I had to have somebody. And I had to have somebody that actually knew how to run things.

And you might be interested to know that Bob Rubin—whom everybody considers sort of a consummate insider, you know, was my Secretary of the Treasury and, before that, head of the first National Economic Council and clearly one of the two or three most important architects of our economic revival—says that McLarty did more than anybody else to establish the spirit of teamwork that we've had.

In 1995, after we lost the Congress, I had a couple of Presidential scholars from Harvard come in. And one of these men—I didn't even know him—he said, "Don't worry. You're going to be reelected." No one thought I was going to be reelected in 1995. I said, "Why do you say that?" He said, "You have the most loyal Cabinet since Thomas Jefferson's second administration." He said, "I never saw anything like it." He said, "There's no backbiting. They work with the White House. You all work together." He said, "I don't know how you all did it, but you're all devoted to each other." And he said, "Believe me, in the end, in ways that no one can quantify, it will work out." So I think the guy's a genius now, even though I never knew him before. [*Laughter*]

Polls

Reverend Hybels. Sometimes it appears as though you live by simply taking the pulse or looking at polling numbers. Other times you seem to step out and lead by conviction, deep conviction. Is that a fair characterization of your leadership?

The President. No. And I'll explain why. First of all, the role of polls is widely misunderstood, so let me tell you a little about at least how I see polls. Let's begin with a poll in a campaign. Who is ahead? Vice President Gore or Governor Bush, right? The Gallup poll says one day Bush is 19 points ahead. Vice President Gore names Joe Lieberman. The next day he's 2 points ahead. Believe me, 17 percent of the people did not really change their mind in one day.

That doesn't mean that Mr. Gallup's organization didn't tell the truth; that is, that they called what they thought was a representative group of people one day, and they called another representative group the other day. But the first thing you need to remember about every poll is, if it's an election, it's a picture of a horse race that's not over. And if you've ever watched a horse race and you see the replays, they always show how it was at the first turn, how it was in the back stretch, how it was at the final turn. Every picture is a poll. That's what—you should keep that in your mind.

So when you see the polls unfold in this Presidential race, you should remember that. And therefore, it's like a horse race. How big is their lead is one issue? Second is, what is it based on? Like if one horse is stronger than another, even he may just be a half—may be a head or even a nose ahead, but if he's a stronger horse, he's going to win anyway. But otherwise, there could be—if the horse has got a lot of juice running third, the horse running third may win.

Now, on the issues, which is what Bill's asking me about, there's something else you need to remember about polls. First of all, they may be totally misleading. I'll explain that. Second, they may change. I'll tell you what I normally use polls for as President. If you go back and look at what I did—in 1992, I issued a booklet called "Putting People First" and said "If you vote for me, this is what I'm going to do." In 1995, Thomas Patterson, the Presidential scholar, said that I had already kept a higher percentage of my commitments than the previous five Presidents, even though I'd made more commitments.

So what do I use polls for on the issues? What I primarily use polls for is to tell me how to make the argument that's most likely to persuade you that I'm right about what I'm trying to do.

Reverend Hybels. Give us an example.

The President. Okay. I'll give you an example where, according to the polls I have the unpopular position, okay? The Congress passes a repeal of the estate tax, an outright repeal. Now, I can—and I'm going to veto it if it comes to my desk, okay? Now, I can say the following. I can say, "I'm going to veto this because it only helps less than 2 percent of the people and half of the relief goes to one-tenth of one percent of the people, and it's an average $10 million." That is a populist explanation.

I can say, "I'm going to veto it because we only have so much money for tax cuts, and I think it's wrong to do this and say this is our highest priority, when we have done nothing to lower the income taxes of low-income working people with three kids or more or to help people pay for child care or long-term care for their elderly or disabled relatives or to get a tax deduction for college tuition."

Or I could say, "I think there should be estate tax relief." I do, by the way. "I don't care if it does help primarily upper income people. The way so many people have made so much money in the stock markets in the last 8 years, there are a lot of family-owned businesses that people would like to pass down to their family members, that would be burdened by the way the estate tax works, plus which the maximum rate is too high. When it was set, income tax rates were higher, but there was a lot of ways to get out of it. Now the rates are lower, but you have less ways to get out of it. You have to pretty much pay what you owe more." So I could say that.

So it's not fair to totally repeal it. Like even Bill Gates has said, "Why are you going to give me a $40 billion tax break." And he's going to give away his money, and I applaud him and honor him for it.

So I could make either of those three arguments. It's helpful to me to know what you're thinking. I know what I think is right. I'm not going to change what I think is right. But in order to continue to be effective, you have to believe I'm right. So that's kind of what I use polls for.

Also, if you know that you've only got time—let's say Congress is going to be in session 3 more months, and you know you can get two things done, and there's five things you want to do. And you like them all five more or less the same, but you just know you can't get it all done, the system won't absorb that much change at once.

It may help you to do a survey to see—for example, the Patients' Bill of Rights that I've been trying to pass for 2 years. One of the reasons that I have felt good about trying to push it—and we keep making progress and the House of Representatives passed it—is that 70 percent of Republicans, Democrats, and independents outside Washington support it. It's helpful to know that, because then you're not asking if—in other words, the Congress is a majority Republican. So if I give them a bill that's got 60 percent of the

Democrats for it and 60 percent of the independents for it, when 60 percent of the Republicans are against it, I'm really asking them to make a sacrifice.

But if give them a bill that Democrats, Republicans, and independents are all for, even though there may be some organized groups against it, I'm not asking them to hurt themselves to do something that I think is good for America. That's how I use polls.

Now, let me just say one other thing. Polls can be misleading.

Reverend Hybels. He loves this stuff. I mean, just listen to this. [*Laughter*]

The President. No, no, but you need to understand it. Polls can be misleading. For example, the polls show that people normally support the positions I took on the Brady bill, banning assault weapons, closing the gun show loophole. Does that mean it's a good thing to do politically? Absolutely not; not necessarily.

One of the reasons the Republicans won the House in 1994 is that I got Democrats to vote for the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban. Why? Let's say people—I'll exaggerate—let's say people are 80 percent for my position and 20 percent for the NRA position. Okay? But if the 80 percent who are for my position are interested in a dozen issues, and it's only a voting issue for 5 percent, and of the 20 percent of the NRA members who are against my position if it's a voting issue for 10 percent, for 15 percent, it means you lose 10 percent of the vote. See what I mean?

So the polls can be totally misleading. Therefore, even though it looked like the public was for us, when we took on guns, when we took on tobacco interests, when we took on a lot of these other things, it was very risky.

And the final thing I want to tell you is, sometimes you have to do things that are unpopular because you know they're right and you're absolutely convinced time will tell. The most unpopular decision I made as President, at the moment I made it, was to give financial aid to Mexico when they were going broke. Remember that a few years ago? On the day I made that decision the polls said that by 81 to 15—81 to 15, you couldn't get those numbers for the proposition that the Sun will come up tomorrow—[*laughter*]—by 81 to 15, the public thought that I should not do that.

It took me 5 minutes to make the decision to do it. It was not a hard decision. We did it right away. Why? Because I knew that no matter what you thought about whether I was doing something wrong, I couldn't allow Mexico to go bankrupt if I could stop it because it was an important trading partner for us; because if they went down, then Argentina and Brazil might go down; countries half way around the world might down; we would be flooded with more illegal immigrants; we'd have more trouble on our border than we could say grace over; and that even if everybody got mad at me and wanted to vote against me, I owed it to you to do what I had more evidence and knowledge of than most voters and go ahead and do what I thought was right. So I did.

You should use polls and you should follow them, but neither those who follow nor those who use should take them too seriously or fail to understand their limits.

Race Relations

Reverend Hybels. If I asked you what are two or three issue-oriented convictions that you are going to stand for from here to the grave, you just go, "This one goes down into my soul"?

The President. The first is the whole question of race. You know, I'm a southerner, I grew up in the segregated South. The most important thing to me is that we learn to live together.

Let me say, for one thing, I'm quite sure that some of my positions are wrong. I'm quite sure some of your positions are wrong. That is, if you know enough and have enough opinions, some of them are going to be wrong.

In a way, one of my very favorite Bible verses is the 12th chapter of the—12th verse of the 12th chapter of First Corinthians: "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now we know in part, but then we shall know even as we are also known. Now abideth faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love"—or charity or charitable love or whatever. Why? Because we see through a glass darkly.

But I'm quite sure that what I am right about is our common humanity and that our common humanity is more important than the things that divide us. The human genome project has discovered that we are genetically more than 99.9 percent the same. Furthermore, it has discovered that if you take—let's say we took four groups. Let's say we take a hundred Chinese, a hundred Indians from South Asia—not Native American—a hundred Indians, a hundred Norwegians, and a hundred West Africans. That the genetic differences between the groups would be less than the genetic differences among the individuals within each racial group—stunning.

Basically, science is confirming what our faith has taught us. And so, to me, if I could have one wish for America it would not be that the economic recovery would go on another decade, it would not be even that the crime rate would be lowered or that we would all—that all of our children would have a chance at a good life. It would be that we would find a way to live together as one America, because we'll figure out how to solve all the problems if we'll stop getting in each other's way. So that's what I believe.

Reverend Hybels. It's funny, when you start going in on this genetic thing—I went to Washington. I think it was a day after you had done all that reading. I walked in the door. You could not wait—[*laughter*]—to tell me the findings of these genetic differences and similarities. And I was thinking, I flew all the way there, sat and listened for an hour and 15 minutes, flew all the way back, and never said a word. [*Laughter*]

The President. But somebody has got to do that to him, right? [*Laughter*]

Reverend Hybels. I think you're two down now.

The President. Boy, I'll pay for that, I'll tell you. I'll pay for that.

Influences on the President

Reverend Hybels. Yes, you're two down now. [*Laughter*] Okay. Dividing your life into thirds, like zero to 20, 20 to 40, 40 until now, which leaders had the most important influence on you in each of those thirds?

The President. Well, when I was very young, my mother was a role model to me and for lots of reasons. She was a good mother, a good provider; she got up early, worked late, put us first—my band director, my high school principal, President Kennedy, a couple of my college professors. Between 20 and 40, I think I admired Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy, a lot of people in public life. Between 40 and 60, especially after I got to be President, I spent more time studying Abraham Lincoln and Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt. And I've been very influenced by Nelson Mandela, who is a good friend of mine and my family; and Yitzak Rabin, the late Prime Minister of Israel, whom I loved very much and was very close to and, as you know, lost his life because he was working for peace in the Middle East, the same thing we're still struggling with.

And I kind of drew something from each of them. But I would say those are the people that have really influenced me.

Presidential Decisions

Reverend Hybels. Okay. What are the toughest one or two decisions you've had to make during your Presidency? When did you just go, "Oh, my goodness gracious, there is no good way this is going to come out, but I've got to make the call."

The President. Well, any time you put Americans into battle, you do, because you know the chances are some of them will die. And even if they don't, they're going to kill somebody else. And you can't use all those big fancy weapons—I don't care how good the computers are, how accurate the weapons are—without some people getting killed that you didn't want to kill.

So the decision to go—the conflict in Kosovo—when I first got elected I had to take a military action against Saddam Hussein because he had authorized an assassination plot on President Bush. I don't know if you all remember that, back in 1993, after President Bush had left office, and he went to the Middle East, and they authorized an assassination squad. Thank goodness it failed. But I couldn't just walk away from that and pretend it didn't happen and pretend the people who were responsible for that thought they could kill an American President who had done something that we all—most of us supported in the Gulf war.

But every time you do that, every time you unleash a missile or send a pilot, and you know that it's life and death, you just have to pray you're right. We did it in actions—there were other times when we took actions over Iraq. There were other times we—more limited actions in Bosnia, because thank goodness, we brought them to the peace table. But I think those are the hardest things.

There were a lot of other things. It was very hard to put together the economic plan in 1993, because I knew the country was deep in trouble. We had quadrupled the debt in 12 years; the deficit was high; the interest rates were high; the economy was weak. And I knew it was going to take a real cold shower to turn it around. And it would take a combination of tax increases, which I wanted to have mostly on upper income people, and spending cuts, which would mostly affect middle and lower income people. But we had to do them both to try to get rid of this deficit. And I knew if we didn't do it, we'd never get there. But I also knew that I was asking a lot of Members of Congress to walk the line and to risk being defeated.

And when the Republicans announced that they would give no votes to it and it was going to be the first major piece of legislation in 50 years to pass with the votes of only one party, you know, I knew what I was asking them to do. But I also knew—I believed very strongly it would work, and I thought if we didn't do something about the deficit and the accumulating debt that we would never turn the country around. And so I did it. But it was very hard for me, because I knew that the Congress would pay the price, because there was no way the economy could be that much better by '94 in the elections, and that if I was right and it worked, that I would be reelected in '96, and they would have, in effect, sacrificed for a decision that I made and got them to support.

And it's turned out that's how it was. That was one of my lower days as President, when that happened.

Reverend Hybels. Now, let's say that it's the night before you have to send troops into battle. Who do you have in the room with you? What process is going on? How do you make that final call to say, "Go"?

The President. Well, you have the national security team, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of Central Intelligence, and a number of other people would be there. And we would probably be meeting in the secure room in the White House that we have for such purposes.

And we would go over all the facts, all the options, what options we had other than going into combat, what our objectives were, what the likelihood of achieving our objectives are, and what could go wrong. And if the worst happens and something goes wrong, what are we going to do then? We try to game it all out and think about it in advance.

Then I go around the room, and whenever I have a big decision, I make everybody tell me what they think. And one of the things that I have tried to cultivate is to tell people I do not want them to tell me what they think I want to hear. And I must say, they have certainly taken that to heart. [*Laughter*]

But one of the problems that Presidents—one of the things that causes Presidents problems is they tend to pick people to be around them who are too much like them. This is not a negative thing. It's a hard job. You're under a lot of pressure. You like to be around people you feel comfortable with, who have the same interests you do, have the same strengths you do. But the truth is, you need to have people around you who see the world differently, who have different experiences, and who have different strengths and skills. So I tried to do that, too. And we just go around, and they all tell me what they think. And then when we have to make a decision, I make a decision.

Reverend Hybels. And would you try to gain consensus, or at a certain point, if you realize there is not consensus, you just say, "Well, men and women, we're going to do this"?

The President. I always try to get them to get a consensus because I know they're smart enough and their takes on things are different enough—the same thing is true in the domestic field. I do the same thing with economic policy.

But if they can get a consensus, more than likely, they're right, because they're not all rubber stamp type people, and they're in there really working it through. And they can present the arguments to me.

But if they can't make a consensus and we run out of time, I just make a decision. I make the best decision I can.

President's Best Moments

Reverend Hybels. All right. You're going to be leaving office in a few months, and you look back and you say—what were one or two of just the highest moments, just the greatest feelings, when you said, "It doesn't get better than this"?

The President. Well, I'll give you a couple. When we won the economic fight in August of '93, I knew it was going to turn the country around. I just knew it. Because the productive capacity of the American people and the fact that we were ahead in this information technology age anyway was beginning to assert itself. And I knew if we could just get the deficit down, get interest rates down, get out of the way of the economy, and then do some things that would speed it up, it would be great. That was a great day.

In September of '93, when Arafat and Rabin met on the White House lawn and I got them to shake hands for the first time in front of a billion people on television, it was an unbelievable day.

When I signed the AmeriCorps bill to give now 150,000 young people a chance to serve at their communities for a year or two and then earn money for college, and I did it with the pens that President Kennedy used to sign the Peace Corps and President Franklin Roosevelt used to sign the Civilian Conservation Corps, that was a great day. It was one of my dreams to do.

In December of '95 I went to Ireland. And our administration was the first American administration ever to become deeply involved in the Irish peace process. And we had just about got a final peace in Northern Ireland. And my people are Irish; they were Irish Protestants from Fermanagh, right on the line between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. And to see 50,000 people in the streets in Belfast, to walk down the Shankel and the Falls, the Catholic and the Protestant neighborhoods, and see them there together, all these young people cheering for peace; see over 100,000 people in Dublin waving American flags and Irish flags, all because they thought America stood for peace.

The first time I went to Sarajevo after the war in Bosnia ended and all these people came up to me on the street and thanked me because America gave them their lives back. You know, that means—you forget the enormous capacity of our country to represent the best hope of humankind. And you realize, when you're President, you're just sort of the temporary steward of something that's so much bigger than you are. But if you use the power in the right way, how it can move the world, not because of you but because of America, because of 226 years of history, because of the values of the country, because of the way it works, I mean, it's unbelievable.

So those were some of the things. There were many more: standing in Nelson Mandela's prison cell with him was a pretty amazing thing. Listening to him tell me the story of how he let go of his hatred and resentment so he could be free to be a human being after being unjustly imprisoned for 27 years. You get a chance to have some pretty good moments in this job. [*Laughter*]

President's Worst Moments

Reverend Hybels. And then describe the lowest point, where you just said, "It doesn't get worse than this."

The President. Well, obviously, one of them was my personal crisis, but we've already talked about that. So if you go beyond that, let me just mention a couple.

Somalia, when we lost 18 of our soldiers in Somalia in a firefight, where somewhere between 300 and 500 Somalis got killed. When our soldiers were asked—we were there—remember we went there to help because people were starving, but this political conflict was going on. And the U.N. had troops there, not just Americans. And a lot of you don't remember, I bet, what precipitated this. One of the factions in the Somalis fighting killed 22 Pakistani troops who were there with us for the United Nations. And the U.N. couldn't just walk away from that.

I mean, they ambushed them. They bushwhacked them and killed them.

So only the United States troops had the capacity to try to arrest those who were responsible. And I remember General Powell coming to me and asking for my approval for us to try. And he said, "I think we've got only a one-in-five, one-in-four chance of getting this guy alive, but we've got a one-in-two chance of some success."

But the people on the ground decided the that best thing to do was to launch an attack in broad daylight on this hotel. And when they did it, it turned out to be an unbelievably bloody battle under unbelievably adverse circumstances, and 18 of our guys died, and several hundred of theirs did. And it wasn't the sort of decision made in the way it should have been made by me, with our involvement. And I felt the sickest I have felt since I've been here. And they were very brave, they fought very well. I gave a couple of them the Medal of Honor, who were killed. They were unbelievable. But it was a terrible moment.

It was a terrible moment when those people were killed in Oklahoma City, because, if you remember, it came—there briefly people assumed that it was some sort of foreign terrorist—remember that—where they were trying to arrest a gentleman who was an Arab-American who was traveling on a plane out of the country. And I thank God for whatever it was that made me think to say to the American people, "Well, don't jump to conclusions here. This may not be what's going on."

And then when we found out what did go on, there was this terribly twisted, disturbed young man who had been affected by all this rhetoric that had been kind of seeping through the underground of America, about how inherently evil the Government and anybody who worked for it was, I just felt sick. I felt, what can we do—I just—and one of those people, by the way, who was killed in Oklahoma City, when I went down there to see his family, they showed me a picture of him at my inaugural. And I was talking to all these victims, and every one of them had a story; people have stories.

If you ever get a chance to go to the Oklahoma City Memorial, if you're ever within a hundred miles of there, stop whatever you're doing and drive and go see it. It is the most effective memorial of its kind I have ever seen. But I just felt that there were forces at work in our society that made my words seem weak and inadequate. And I wanted to do something to try to heal the heart of the country, to go beyond sort of bigger than policies and bills and who was up and who was down. It was just unbelievable.

So those two things kind of stand out to me as really low moments. And I mention just personally, for my allies, I felt sick when the '94 congressional elections occurred, because I felt like those people bled for a decision that I got them to make. So I felt responsible for their losing their careers, even though I thought what we did was right for the country. And I think the future bore us out.

President's Legacy

Reverend Hybels. What would you like to be remembered for?

The President. I would like to be remembered for leading the country through a great period of transformation. This period is most like what happened at the turn of the last century, when Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson led America from an agricultural country into an industrial country and helped us to make the changes necessary in that context to reaffirm our commitment of opportunity for every responsible citizen and to realize, in that context, what our responsibilities to one another were, to have one national community.

And I would like to be remembered as the President that led America from the industrial era into the information age, into a new global society that reaffirmed the importance of our mutual responsibility to one another and the importance of guaranteeing an opportunity to everybody, and that I was a force for peace and freedom and decency in the world, that tried to bring people together instead of drive people apart, tried to empower poor people so they could have a chance like everybody else, and that tried to change the nature of our politics so we spent more time debating our ideas than trying to destroy our opponents and basically tried to lift us up

and move us on. That's how I'd like to be remembered.

The Presidency

Reverend Hybels. One of the last times we were together, we were just taking a little stroll around the White House grounds, and you said, "Man, I'm going to miss this job." What are you going to miss about it?

The President. People ask me all the time, what are you going to miss the most? Will it be living in the White House, which is the best public housing in America—[*laughter*]—or going to Camp David, which is a pretty good vacation home, or getting on Air Force One, which relieves me of all the kind of screaming tedium that tests your faith every time you walk in an airport? [*Laughter*] But the truth is—or having the Marine Band play "Hail To The Chief" every time you walk in a room? [*Laughter*] I've had a couple of my predecessors tell me you feel lost when you walk in a room the first 4 or 5 months, and nobody plays the song anymore. [*Laughter*]

But what I will miss more than anything else is the job. I loved the job. I love it every day. My biggest problem now is I hate to go to sleep at night. I go to bed, and I sit there, and I read for hours. I just keep working. I'm trying to get everything done I can do before I leave. I have loved the work.

I wanted to be President at a time when I was very happy being the Governor of my State, very happy with the life that Hillary and Chelsea and I had in Arkansas, because I wanted to make some specific changes in the direction of the country. I had a very clear idea of what I wanted to do. And it is the most rewarding work you could ever imagine.

And believe it or not, it's a job like other jobs. I mean, it really matters how hard you work at it. It matters how smart you work at it. It matters whether you've got a good team helping you. I mean, it's not sort of like—sometimes I think it assumes proportions, the Presidency does, that are both too mythical and too trivial, as if it's all just positioning and politics. Not true. It's a job, like other jobs.

It matters what you think you're supposed to do. It matters whether you've got a strategy to get there. It matters whether you've got a good team. And it matters how hard you work. And problems yield to effort, just like other jobs. And the work—I will miss the work.

And the other thing I'll really miss is the opportunity on a regular and consistent basis to come in contact with every conceivable kind of human being. I hope that I can find something to do when I leave office which will at least keep me in contact with different kinds of people who have different interests and know different things, from whom I can continue to learn and for whom I can continue to contribute.

But it was the job that I loved. Every day. Even the terrible days, I loved the work. People ask me all the time, "How did you survive all that?" I said, "I remembered who hired me." I got up in the morning and said, "At some level, Presidents aren't supposed to have feelings. They're supposed to be servants. They're supposed to remember who hired them. And you get 24 hours in a day, and you have to sleep a little, and you need to take time for your family and renewal, but otherwise, you need to be there for the American people."

And it's just been a joy. I can't even—I don't even have the words to describe how much I love the work.

Mission of Church Leaders

Reverend Hybels. I just have a couple minutes left. There's many, many thousands of pastors here and at the satellite sites. And if I said, what challenge, what words of inspiration would you have for pastors? Is what they're doing important? How do you see it in the overall scheme of things?

The President. Well, first of all, I would say that I believe in what it is you're doing here, because every one of us who has a job that anybody ever held before we did is normally reluctant to admit we don't know everything we should know about how to do it. I mean, we think, well, everybody knows what the President does. Pick up a textbook. Everybody knows what a pastor does. I mean, you've got to pass the plate on Sunday; you've got to get enough money in to keep the church open; you've got to—[*inaudible*]. It's not true. There are ways to imagine what you

do that will dramatically increase your effectiveness in doing what God put you on Earth to do.

And what I would say is I think that—I wish I'd actually spent more time even than I have thinking about that in my work. And so I think—I'll go back to what I said—I think basically America works best when it's really strong at the grassroots. And that means that the role of community churches is pivotal.

The second thing I would say is, to everybody listening to me, we may have very different political views about certain issues, or maybe a lot of different political parties, but I think every church needs a mission that goes beyond its members. And I think that this church does, and I respect it very much.

I think that the words of Christ in St. Matthews about how we're all going to be judged in part by how we dealt toward the least of these is very important, especially in a time of extraordinary prosperity like this one.

And the final thing I would say is you asked me today about whether these pastors should minister to other politicians, and I said some things about politicians and their spiritual needs and me in mind. But that's really true of everyone.

One of the things I think that must be hardest—one of the most rewarding things I think about being a pastor, and yet one of the hardest things to remember, especially as you have some success, is that whether you have 20,000 members in your church or 200, they've all got a story, and they all have their needs, and they're all—they have a claim as a child of God to have a certain level of connection. And as you get bigger and more successful, you've got to figure out how to keep giving it to them, because nobody goes through this whole life without a slip or a turn or a scar or a challenge or something that seems just beyond their ability to cope with.

And so I think learning these leadership skills and thinking about what your job is—all I can tell you is that's what's kept me going for 8 years. I just kept thinking about the personal stories of all the people who touched me and reminded me of why I was supposed to show up every day.

I think if you can do that and have a mission that deals with your members as individuals and that goes beyond your members, I think America will be better. And I know that all of us who are involved in these endeavors will be better.

The last thing I want to say is—I used to say this about Al Gore all the time; I used to say, when I was being criticized, he doesn't get enough credit for what we did together that is good, and surely no fairminded person would blame him for any mistake that I made. I hope you'll feel that way about Hybels. I've got to make up for these two cuts I took him. [*Laughter*] He didn't fail in his ministry because I did. And what he did was good for America, because I needed somebody to talk to, to brace me up, and make me think about things in another way. It was a gift. It's something I'll treasure all my life. And for those of you who have whatever political or personal differences you have, I hope you will still believe that he did the right thing, because he did.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:15 p.m. at the Willow Creek Community Church. In his remarks, he referred to Gordon McDonald, senior minister, Grace Chapel Congregation, Lexington, MA; Tony Campolo, associate pastor, Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, West Philadelphia, PA; Rev. J. Philip Wogaman, pastor, Foundry United Methodist Church, Washington, DC; President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority.

Statement on the "Older Americans 2000: Key Indicators of Well-Being" Report

August 10, 2000

Today I am pleased that a new study has been released that demonstrates that older Americans are healthier and prospering more than ever before. The findings of the Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics' report "Older Americans 2000: Key Indicators of Well-Being" shows that that the life expectancy for Americans has increased by more than 20 years since 1990—women from 51 to 79 years old and men from 48 to 74 years old—and that the number of